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## DELUSION, MASS-SUGGESTION, AND THE WAR: A DREAM AND THE AWAKENING

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THE classification of delusions as innocent and dangerous does not commend itself to the scientific student; to a practical-minded society, exposed to the contagion of error, the distinction is supreme. Circle-squarers, discoverers of perpetual motion, solvers of the riddle of the universe are nuisances only to the patent-office, to philanthropists, and to professors. But couple the same order of mental twist with a grudge, give it a setting in political conflict, and you have the motive that made martyrs of three Presidents. The erratic masses have the same complexion as the erratic individual; but the collective menace is indefinitely more formidable. Yet popular delusions may be fairly innocent. When the stolid Dutch burghers of the seventeenth century spent half a fortune for a rare tulip-bulb, or the staid investors of France and England in the eighteenth century fought for the privilege of subscribing to the "Mississippi Scheme" and other speculative "bubbles," or the corresponding classes of New York and Boston fell for the "Perkin's tractors" (see Oliver Wendell Holmes), or put blue glass in their windows to absorb the health radiations before the days of absent treatment, the fad had no more serious aspect than the loss of money, of energy, and the momentary depreciation of the currency of sanity. When a powerful nation loses its reason on the subject of war, the world is aflame; and the allied fire-departments of the sane nations are summoned to extinguish the conflagration.

The stages of the made-in-Germany war may be traced psychologically in terms of delusion and mass-suggestion. The mental munitions were as essential as those for rifles and shells. Like the material preparedness, the campaign of delusion was inaugurated decades ago. An early form of the delusion was that of encirclement. The German people were encouraged to believe that they were surrounded by envious and increasingly aggressive nations. The French motive was revenge; the English greed; Russia stood for the Slavic peril. Gradually the

suggestion took hold that war was inevitable; the "*Tag*" was on the calendar. Once endured, the notion was cherished, then embraced. The delusion was incorporated in desire, enhanced by ambition, and justified by a flattered self-esteem. The finger of destiny pointed to the German Empire; the German was the superior race; German Kultur alone could redeem mankind. Every delusion, every subterfuge, every evasion is motivated by desire—as no one has more subtly demonstrated than the keen Austrian alienist, Dr. Freud—but in its expression meets with resistances. These must be overcome. The moral resistance goes out against an offensive war; defense is sanctioned, becomes a patriotic virtue. Hence the further elaboration of the delusion—the fiction of a preventive war. The transfer of guilt to others is essential to the self-esteem of delusion. Since the enemy is preparing to attack, he can be met only by an anticipating offensive. Hence the war, however it came, was "the war that is thrust upon us." That phrase is the nub of the aberration, repeated to nauseating insincerity, but clung to to the last. It remained set as the keystone of the delusion; with that loosened or detached, the arch must crumble.

War is a complex enterprise; the system of delusion that supports it is equally so. The soil in which delusion is to grow must be well prepared. The cultivating process is at once positive and negative. The mind must be made docile and submissive; it must see and see intensely what it is directed to see, and nothing else. The blinders must not be worn on the outside where they might be removed; they must be grafted on the seeing organ itself, and induce a mental blindness. Obedience to orders must be made a national habit, and *Verboten* signs plentifully distributed and rigidly heeded. Habits of thought must be censored; the press is to print only what the Minister of Delusion issues. The people must be fed on figments in generous rations, and substitutes for truth circulated at all hazards. To within three days of the final smash, all enemy attacks were uniformly repulsed in the German reports, all retirements were voluntary and to carefully prepared positions. The Marne was an unknown river in Germany; victories were heralded in megaphonic tones, and promises were accepted when victories failed.

The technique of denial and that of justification were carried on side by side; the deluded mind is not sensitive to inconsistency. Belgian civilians were snipers; the stories of Hun cruelties were fabricated in London. The German army remained the finest school of morality anywhere in session; Ger-

man Kultur could not be guilty of the reported violations; and whatever Germans did was right, as the State could do no wrong. The more tender-minded German citizens, retaining reserves of moral resistance, were narcotized by the denial; the tough-minded who had abandoned them (and in the sacrifice, if such it was, could be comforted by the authority of Nietzsche) were stiffened by the official sanctification. So vast a delusion must reach and enthrall all sorts and conditions of men. The *Massensuggestion*—which is the German term for the mote in their neighbor's eye and is not applied to the beam in their own—was as huge and as highly organized as the German army itself; recruits of delusion can not be conscripted, but they enlist in equal numbers by the contagion of suggestion. The machinery of delusion must be kept running, and all the reserves of the psychological armament drawn upon. There was the campaign of hate, as well as the campaign of superiority, and the campaign of Pan-German ambition, the whole culminating in a gigantic, relentless megalomania. Follow the trail of the hate, and it leads to the bitterest disappointment. France was expected to resist; that England should shatter the glorious plan at the outset by keeping her pledge to Belgium made all Englishmen hypocrites, and the German's daily prayer: "*Gott strafe England!*" For that is the way of delusions among the insane in asylums as in nations at large, fixing the object of suspicion or wrath upon the frustrator of desire.

It is true to the psychology of delusion that it should aspire to the intensive force of great emotional exaltation by which the heroic deeds of individuals and the collective enthusiasms of masses have reached the high moments of human endeavor. A mystic, a religious fervor attaches to them, retaining in the one instance and losing in the other the fine distinction that divides the sublime from the ridiculous. Exaggeration and self-absorption inhere in both. The partnership of the Kaiser and Gott—now apparently dissolved—is more a symptom than a pose. The imperial exaltation and autocratic omnipotence of a sacrosanct emblem of power is a popular asset to the spread of a dazzling cause. The same self-deluded and self-exalted mood of prerogative extends to the lesser stars of the constellation; and the wretched Zabern affair thrilled far more generally than it outraged the German sense of propriety.

Out of it all grew the national habit of delusion, the refusal on the part of those directing, the inability in those who succumbed to the delusion to see things as they are. Figments, fictions, vain imaginings, blind denials, perverted excuses, crude

suspicion, unreason rampant, all sanity forsaken in a psychic saturnalia of abandonment: such is the picture of *Mania Teutonica*! Such is its contribution to the history of mass-suggestion; such is the world war considered not as a military conflict of nations, but as the direst mental epidemic, the most devastating trench-fever that has ever swept over the minds of men to their undoing.

All delusions reflect the expressions and the circumstances of their time. In older days deluded patients heard divine voices in the air; now the inspired messages come through an invisible telephone. Formerly the victims writhed under the torture of the minions of Satan; now they suffer through "malicious animal magnetism" and mental vibrations. The political aspect of the great German delusion that precipitated the world-war and maintained it for four years in all its terror, all its running amuck among the shrines and sanctuaries of civilization, wears the garb of the twentieth century. Since liberty is the political concept of the generation, the Germans maintained the delusion that they were free. They accepted the strait-jacket as the uniform of patriotic discipline, and the padded cell as a token of solicitous paternalism. They accepted the tether of their permitted excursions as the limit of wise desire, and the goose-step as an improvement in human locomotion. German *Freiheit*, like German *Treue*, was an ancient quality; its venerability ensured its permanence, let the facts be what they may. The license of other lands inhabited by a degenerate and mercenary folk was an unenviable example; the invincible German army was the triumphant reward of discipline, and the industrial conquests—the only real structure in their astigmatic *Realpolitik*—a comfortable second prize for the dull days of peace. Through the network of delusion runs the double strand of concern for the values regarded by the rest of mankind, and the camouflaged thread that loosens every mesh. Germany professes peace while she plots war; Germany is indignant that neutrals should have opinions denouncing Teutonic ways, and places its arch-spies in the embassies of countries too generous to be unduly suspicious.

Somewhere in the moving German theater of war hangs the curtain that separates the performers on the stage from the audience: the responsible actors initiated into the plot and the deluded people who accept the drama as real. Unmistakable is the responsibility of the intellectuals, and pitiable the treason to their trust. *Lehrfreiheit und Lernfreiheit*! another slogan of delusion! Again the two camps of denial and of justification.

The ninety-three professors, thirty-five of them men of science, professing loyalty to the principles of proof, yet protesting seven times over: "*It is not true that*" of violations in Belgium of which they could not have the slightest knowledge, and which have been proved seven times worse than first reported; quite as many of the learned guild justifying by shameful jugglery the crassest fallacies and grossest idols of the mob. Can one fail to suspect that they owe the high positions which they occupy to the truculent qualities revealed under the stress of a war-delusion? The military and political leaders may have heavier sins to bear, but they have not added prostitution to their crimes. What wonder that with such perversity among respected leaders, the baneful suggestion could spread without check among the well-drilled masses! For the overwhelming fact, once we have partially recovered from the super-Satanic enormity of the plot, is the eager acceptance of such a devastating, demoralizing, dementing delusion by a supposedly enlightened people. It is as true of nations as of offending individuals, that those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.

Yet the interest of the psychologist is not in judgment as denunciation, but as understanding. Now that we can see in close retrospect the movement of events steadily and see them whole, we turn with admiration to those whose insight was prompter and truer than ours. Our lack of preparedness to meet the military situation testified to our creditable incredulity that such things could be; our lack of understanding of the stages of revelation requires to be more charitably interpreted to be so regarded. Of all the readers of the handwriting on the wall—now that Babylon has fallen—none is more deserving of the honor that is denied to prophets in their own lands and beyond them, than Professor Otfried Nippold of the University of Berne. A specialist in international law, a supporter of the Hague Conferences, the son of a German professor, a close student of German tendencies, his warning issued in 1913 in his "German Chauvinism" remained largely unheeded, despite the fact that the volume contains Germany's own evidence of hope and intention, of confident defiance and overweening self-assertion. It is to Professor Nippold's credit that for five years he has interpreted the German situation as a vain dream, and has consistently predicted the awakening and the *Katzenjammer* of many a day after. He has ever had confidence in the existence of another mind in Germany, a minority, small but not insignificant, the true *Realpolitiker*, ready to see things as

they are—as other sane people see them. Deeply disappointed in the renegade performances of the Social-Democratic leaders, he yet hoped against hope that the saving remnant in Sodom would appear. As a Swiss neutral, he protested against the right of a formal neutrality to deprive him of free speech. He warned the German Swiss of the treachery of the propaganda of Berlin, and, like President Wilson, he held it to be the duty of all true friends of Germany to save the German people from their arch enemies, the German autocratic government. And yet, in February, 1918, bowing to the despairing truth as he saw it, he wrote:

The people has no voice, and indeed it has no desire to make its voice seriously heard; it is content if it can but shout "Hurrah!" with Hindenburg. The German Revolution is still remote. The German people has not yet awakened. And the German Reichstag is the personification of modesty; it believes everything that the Government considers it desirable that it should believe.

With a stronger faith in the psychological uniformity of human emotion, he would have anticipated that the violence of the reaction would be proportional to the intensity of the disillusionment. The vain dream of Teutonic mania, the terrible nightmare of the rest of the world is over; the awakening has come. The road to recovery is long and difficult, but it is the clearly charted road of sanity. The lesson of the war is not alone the triumph of right, but the supremacy of sanity, the enthronement of right thinking as the safeguard of right action. The lesson of Germany, as the fallen assailant of right thinking and right action, is a demonstration on a national scale of the psychology of delusion. Delusion and deception, the one inward, the other outward in its operation, hold the psychological key to the frightful drama that was played on the political stage. The technique of the self-delusion with its sense of superiority, disdain of others, blindness of mind toward the obvious and the real, calls to its aid the technique of the deception of others by treachery, intrigue and plot. The common ground is the domain of lying, and the brutal products of cruelty, hatred and the abandonment of restraint. It is the war as a psychological phenomenon that is enlightening, the costly demonstration that the minds of men are the arbiters of their fate. The delusion that begins as a mockery ends as a snare.